

Message Text

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17

ACTION EA-14

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 697

INFO AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMCONSUL UDORN

CINCPAC

SECDEF

DIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 2686

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, TH

SUBJECT: THE BAN NA SAI AFFAIR BECOMES A CAUSE CELEBRE

REF: A) BANGKOK 1352

B) BANGKOK 1730

C) EMBAIR A-31

SUMMARY: ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, A FORMER MP FROM NAKHON PHANOM AND FOR BAN NA SAI VILLAGERS, INCLUDING THE VILLAGE CHIEF, HAVE CLAIMED THAT RTG FORCES ATTACKED AND BURNED BAN NA SAI VILLAGE IN BUNG KAN DISTRICT OF NONG KHAI ON JANUARY 24 AND THAT THE ATTACK WAS UNPROVOKED. PRESS COVERAGE AND ATTENTION BY THE PEOPLE FOR DEMOCRACY WILL PROBABLY MAKE THE BAN NA SAI ATTACK A SOURCE OF EMBRASSMENT FOR THE RTG. ACCORDING TO AVAILABLE BUT FRAGMENTARY INFORMATION, A JOINT RTG FORCE DID GO INTO BAN NA SAI ON JANUARY 24 INTENDING TO ARREST CERTAIN CT SUPPORT ELEMENTS AND SYMPATHIZERS. IN THE ENSUING ACTIVITY RTG FORCES
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INTENTIONALLY BURNED DOWN AN UNKNOWN NUMBER OF HOUSES. CSOC

COMMANDER LTG SAIYUD CLAIMS THAT THE RTG, THROUGH CSOC, WILL FULFILL ITS "MORAL RESPONSIBILITY" TO MAKE AMENDS TO THE VILLAGERS WHO HAVE SUFFERED. HE BELIEVES THAT WITH THIS ACCOMPLISHED AND AFTER THE PRESENT POLITICAL FUROR HAS ABATED, THE NEXT STEP WILL BE TO DETERMINE THE "LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES", THAT IS, WHERE THE FAULT LIES.

COMMENT: BAN NA SAI IS TYPICAL OF MANY VILLAGES IN THE LESS SECURE PARTS OF THAILAND THAT HAVE COME UNDER CT INFLUENCE. AS REPORTED IN REFTEL THE PEOPLE REPORTEDLY APPLAUDED CT FORCES WHICH ATTACKED A VDC POST AT BAN NA SAI ON JANUARY 16. THIS MAY HAVE PROVOKED THE "EMOTIONAL" ACTIVITY OF THE RTG FORCE AS EXPLAINED BY LTG SAIYUD. HIS BELIEF THAT THE PRESS FUROR WILL DIE DOWN MAY BE PREMATURE. END SUMMARY.

1. AS A RESULT OF PRESS PUBLICITY, THE RTG SWEEP JANUARY 24 OF BAN NA SAI, BUNG KAN DISTRICT, NONG KHAI PROVINCE, IN WHICH GOVERNMENT FORCES ALLEGEDLY BURNED 120 HOMES AND 20 VILLAGERS WERE KILLED, (REFTELS AND REFAIR) IS FAST BECOMING A CAUSE CELEBRE. ON FEBRUARY 11, CHUAN KITTISIWORAPHAN, FORMER MP FROM NAKHON PHANOM, WAS QUOTED IN THE BANGKOK WORLD AS CHARGING THAT RTG FORCES, SPECIFICALLY VILLAGE VOLUNTEERS AND POLICE, NOT CT'S AS ORIGINALLY REPORTED BY RTG SOURCES, HAD BURNED THE VILLAGE ON JANUARY 24. ON FEBRUARY 12 THAI-LANGUAGE THAI RATH CHARGED THAT BAN NA SAI HAD BEEN DESTROYED BY BPP AND POLICE SPECIAL ACTION FORCE (SAF) ELEMENTS. ON FEBRUARY 14 BOTH THE THAI-LANGUAGE AND ENGLISH-LANGUAGE PRESS FRONT-PAGED AN ACCOUNT OF A PRESS CONFERENCE BY FOUR BAN NA SAI VILLAGERS, INCLUDING THE VILLAGE CHIEF, IN WHICH THE VILLAGERS PORTRAYED THE RTG ATTACK JANUARY 24 AS UNPROVOKED. THE VILLAGERS STATED THAT THAI PEOPLES LIBERATION ARMED FORCE (CT) SOLDIERS "OFTEN CAME TO THE VILLAGE"; AND THAT "SOME OF THE TERRORISTS ACT AS IF THEY ARE OUR BOSS, ASKING FOR FOOD AND RICE." ACCORDING TO THE BANGKOK POST ACCOUNT FEBRUARY 14, THE VILLAGERS SAID THE GUERILLAS CAME FROM THE NEARBY PHU SING RANGE, BUT APART FROM FIVE OR SIX YOUNG MEN WHO FLED INTO THE JUNGLE MANY YEARS BACK, NONE WERE NATIVES OF BAN NA SAI.

2. THE BAN NA SAI CASE HAS BEEN TAKEN UP BY THE PEOPLE FOR DEMOCRACY (PFD) GROUP -- PARTICULARLY IN THE PERSON OF
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THIRAYUTH BOOMMEE, WHICH HAD SENT A SIX-MAN FACT-FINDING GROUP TO NA SAI AND WHICH ORGANIZED THE PRESS CONFERENCE MENTIONED ABOVE. IT IS LIKELY THAT, STIMULATED BY THE PFD, THIS CASE WILL CONTINUE TO RECEIVE PUBLICITY AND TO BE A CAUSE OF EMBARRASSMENT TO THE RTG. PRIME MINISTER SANYA, ACCORDING TO THE BANGKOK POST FEBRUARY 14, WAS "DISTURBED" BY THE PRESS ALLEGATION, FELT THE MATTER TO BE "EXTRAORDINARILY COMPLICATED" AND NOTED THAT RTG AUTHORITIES HAD ALREADY ORDERED INVESTIGATIONS.

3. THE BASIC FACTS OF THE DETERIORATING SECURITY SITUATION IN BUNG KAN, OF THE STRUGGLES IN AND AROUND BAN NA SAI, AND OF THE GENERAL ENVIRONMENT OF THAT REMOTE BORDER AREA ON THE LAO BORDER HAVE BEEN REPORTED IN THE REFERENCES. ALTHOUGH NO FORMAL RTG INQUIRY HAS YET BEEN ACCOMPLISHED, FRAGMENTARY REPORTS FROM EMBASSY SOURCES POINT TO THE CONCLUSION THAT (A) IN THE EARLY MORNING HOURS OF JANUARY 24 AN RTG FORCE OF BPP, SAF AND POLICE-LED VDC LED A SWEEP INTO BAN NA SAI WITH THE INTENT OF ARRESTING CERTAIN SUSPECTED CT SUPPORT ELEMENTS AND SYMPATHIZERS; AND THAT (B) IN THE ENSUING EXCITEMENT AN UNKNOWN NUMBER OF HOUSES WERE INTENTIONALLY BURNED DOWN BY THE RTG FORCES. AS LTG SAIYUD KERDPHOL, CHAIRMAN OF THE SCOC OPERATIONS CONTROL CENTER, EXPLAINED IT TO AN EMBASSY OFFICER FEBRUARY 14, THE RTG FORCES BECAME EMOTIONAL".

4. AS FAR AS BAN NA SAI IS CONCERNED, THE IMMEDIATE RESPONSE OF THE RTG, ACCORDING TO LTG SAIYUD, IS TO HAVE THE GOVERNMENT, THROUGH CSOC, FULFILL ITS "MORAL RESPONSIBILITY" TO MAKE AMENDS TO THOSE VILLAGERS WHO HAVE SUFFERED THERE. WITH THIS ACCOMPLISHED, AND AFTER THE PRESENT POLITICAL FUROR HAS ABATED, SAIYUD SAID THE NEXT STEP WOULD BE TO DETERMINE THE "LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES", THAT IS, WHERE THE FAULT LIES.

COMMENT: THE CONCENTRATION OF ATTENTION ON THIS ONE VILLAGE MAY, UNFORTUNATELY, OBSCURE THE FACT THAT THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF VILLAGES IN OR NEAR INSECURE AREAS IN THAILAND IN MUCH THE SAME SITUATION AS BAN NA SAI. THESE VILLAGES HAVE EITHER WEAK SELF-DEFENSE FORCES OR NONE AT ALL. THEY ARE VULNERABLE TO CT PROPAGANDA AND ORGANIZATIONAL WORK, OFTEN IN THE DAYTIME AS WELL AS AT NIGHT. GOVERNMENT PRESENCE IS OFTEN INTERMITTENT AND INEFFECTIVE. AS IN THE CASE OF BAN NA SAI, THEY SOMETIMES FALL -- BY DEFAULT -- UNDER CT DOMINANCE. RTG SECURITY FORCES, CONFIDENTIAL

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FRUSTRATED BY THEIR INABILITY TO DIVORCE THE VILLAGERS FROM LOCAL CT ELEMENTS, COME TO REGARD MANY OF THE VILLAGERS AS WELL AS THE CT ARMED UNITS AS THE ENEMY. HATREDS DEVELOP AMONG OPPOSING ELEMENTS IN THE VILLAGE. IN THIS CONTEXT, ACTION SUCH AS THAT AT BAN NA SAI BECOME DIFFICULT TO AVOID. AS LTG SAIYUD PUT IT, "NA SAI WAS NOT THE FIRST VILLAGE TO BE BURNED IN RTG CI OPERATIONS." AS REPORTED IN REFTTEL THE PEOPLE REPORTEDLY APPLAUDED CT FORCES WHICH ATTACKED A VDC POST AT BAN NO SAI ON JANUARY 16. THIS MAY HAVE PROVOKED THE EMOTIONAL" ACTIVITY OF THE RTG FORCE AS EXPLAINED BY LTG SAIYUD. HIS BELIEF THAT THE PRESS FUROR WILL DIE DOWN MAY BE PREMATURE. KINTNER

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